

Meyer's Management Models

21. Empowerment Cycle

How can I gradually empower my direct reports?

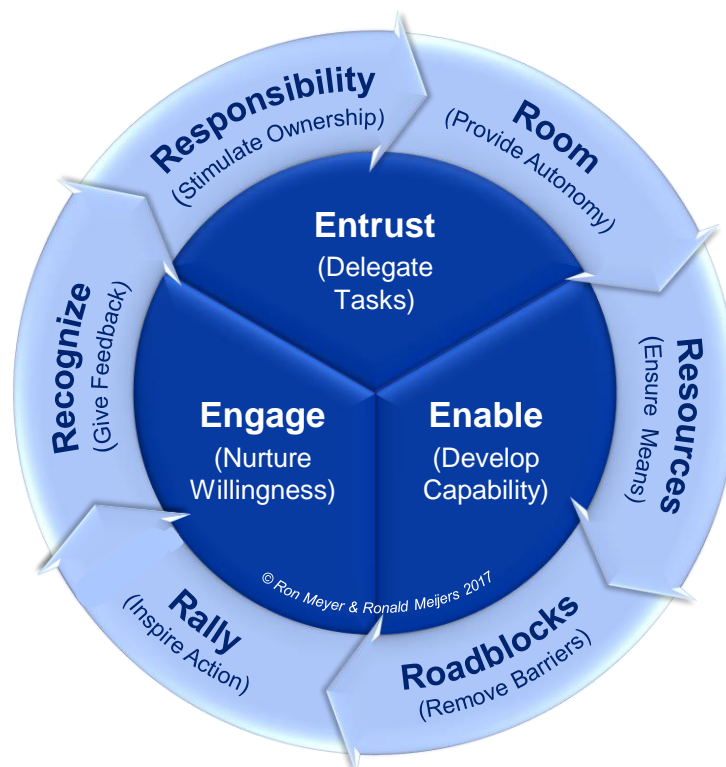
Key Definitions

Empowerment is the process of giving people the power to act. Employees are empowered if they feel they can take decisions and initiate action on their own, without having to ask permission from people in positions of authority.

Done well, empowerment gives employees a higher sense of ownership and motivation, while allowing them to move more quickly and flexibly. For managers it means delegating more and directly controlling less, freeing up time and energy to invest in other activities.

Conceptual Model

The *Empowerment Cycle* is based on the premise that you can't force people to show initiative but can only create conditions that will entice them to take actions themselves. As these actions need to be effective, empowerment is a gradual process, going through constant iterations, instead of a one-off event. The model is based on the metaphor of a (British) roundabout, that empowers motorists to make their own decisions, but still nudges them to do the right thing. There are six conditions (split into three categories) that managers can use to facilitate the process of empowerment. However, employees still need to grab the power offered to them.



Key Elements

The three main categories of management actions that empower are:

1. **Entrust.** All empowerment starts with delegating tasks to others. Delegating can be limited to transferring the 'doing of the work', but to truly empower you also need to delegate the

'deciding on how to do the work' and even the 'deciding on what work to do'. On the other hand, entrusting too much too quickly is not delegating, but dumping, and this can leave people feeling overwhelmed, not empowered. Managers should entrust by giving:

- a. *Responsibility*. Managers need to stimulate people to take full ownership of tasks, accepting responsibility and accountability for achieving results.
 - b. *Room*. At the same time, managers need to give people enough freedom to determine their own choices, to have their own approach and to make their own mistakes.
2. **Enable**. People will feel empowered if they are not only *allowed*, but also *able* to carry out a task. Enablement is about ensuring that people's capability to perform keeps up with the work delegated to them. On the other hand, people's abilities can also grow faster than their tasks, making them feel overqualified. To solve this requires more delegation. Managers can enable people by helping out with two types of challenges:
- a. *Resources*. Managers need to ensure that people have the right skills and experience, but also enough time, information, money, and connections to perform the tasks.
 - b. *Roadblocks*. At the same time, managers need to be available to give advice, solve problems, settle conflicts, and manage stakeholders, so people can move forward.
3. **Engage**. In order to let people decide for themselves, managers need to feel confident that these people know what is expected of them and are committed to doing the right things. Where people embrace the organization's direction and want to make it a success, they are engaged and will act in accordance with the organization's interests. Managers can get others to engage by using two types of interaction:
- a. *Rally*. Managers can explain the big picture, indicating how people's tasks fit into the whole, and try to build buy-in and enthusiasm to realize the organization's objectives.
 - b. *Recognize*. At the same time, managers should give constructive feedback on how people are performing, show appreciation, and encourage them to move ahead.

Key Insights

- **Empowerment is about giving people power**. Empowerment is not about dumping tasks on people and then letting them figure out how to do these activities. It is about delegating tasks and then facilitating people in such a way that they feel confident that they can be successful at carrying out these activities. People need to feel in control of their work.
- **Empowerment is not about giving up control**. Empowerment is not about letting people loose to do whatever they want. Rather, it is about giving people more self-determination, while guiding them to use this freedom wisely and effectively. Managers can still steer, but indirectly, by shaping the conditions under which people carry out their tasks.
- **Empowerment requires entrusting, enabling and engaging**. To empower, managers need to entrust tasks to people (so they are *allowed* to decide and do), enable people (so they are *able* to decide and do), and engage people (so they are *aligned* on what they decide and do). All three empowerment activities need to be carried out in sync.
- **Empowerment should be a gradual process**. People should not have a deluge of tasks suddenly thrust upon them but need to grow into an increasing amount of responsibilities and room, going around the empowerment cycle multiple times over an extended period.
- **Empowerment should be an individual process**. The speed at which people go around the empowerment cycle needs to depend on how fast each specific individual can learn and take on new responsibilities. Managers shouldn't take a one-size-fits-all approach to their people and shouldn't let empowerment be limited by their own inability or fear.

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Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Mind the Gap Model</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2019</i>	<i>Digital Platform Map</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>September 2019</i>	<i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i>	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>Revenue Model Framework</i>	<i>Revenue Model Typology</i>
<i>November 2019</i>	<i>House of Engagement</i>	<i>Organizational Engagement</i>
<i>December 2019</i>	<i>Confidence Quotient</i>	<i>Trust Building</i>
<i>January 2020</i>	<i>Competition Tornado</i>	<i>Competitive Strategy</i>
<i>February 2020</i>	<i>11C Synergy Model</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Management</i>
<i>March 2020</i>	<i>Leadership Fairness Model</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Agility Model</i>	<i>Strategy Process Approach</i>
<i>May 2020</i>	<i>Control Panel</i>	<i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i>
<i>June 2020</i>	<i>Rising Star Framework</i>	<i>Talent Management</i>
<i>July 2020</i>	<i>Strategy Development Cycle</i>	<i>Strategy Process Steps</i>
<i>August 2020</i>	<i>71 Roles of the Corporate Center</i>	<i>Corporate Organization</i>
<i>September 2020</i>	<i>Storytelling Scripts</i>	<i>Leadership Communication</i>
<i>October 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Bets Framework</i>	<i>Strategic Decision-Making</i>
<i>November 2020</i>	<i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i>	<i>Organizational Resilience</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Leadership Competences</i>
<i>January 2021</i>	<i>Digital Product Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>February 2021</i>	<i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>March 2021</i>	<i>Empowerment Cycle</i>	<i>Employee Empowerment</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>Innovation Box</i>	<i>Innovation Approaches</i>
<i>May 2021</i>	<i>Team-Building Cycle</i>	<i>Team-Building Process</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Followership Cycle</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>July 2021</i>	<i>Partnership Distance Model</i>	<i>Interorganizational Relations</i>
<i>August 2021</i>	<i>Fruits & Nuts Matrix</i>	<i>Priority-Setting</i>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Deft Dialogue Model</i>	<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>
<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Strategy Hourglass</i>	<i>Strategy Process Timing</i>
<i>November 2021</i>	<i>Powerhouse Model</i>	<i>People & Organization Strategy</i>
<i>December 2021</i>	<i>New Pyramid Principle</i>	<i>Presentation Approaches</i>
<i>January 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>
<i>February 2022</i>	<i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Embedded Identity Model</i>	<i>Personal Awareness</i>